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ACCEPTANCE

This dissertation, A NODAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A (BE)COMING TATTOOED BODY, by KRISTA ANN HILTON, was prepared under the direction of the candidate's Dissertation Advisory Committee. It is accepted by the committee members in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree, Doctor of Philosophy, in the College of Education and Human Development, Georgia State University.

The Dissertation Advisory Committee and the student's Department Chairperson, as representatives of the faculty, certify that this dissertation has met all standards of excellence and scholarship as determined by the faculty.

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A NODAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A (BE)COMING TATTOOED BODY

by

KRISTA ANN HILTON

Under the Direction of Jodi Kaufmann

ABSTRACT

By exploring how my/a tattooed body functions as becoming through the concept of bodies without organs (BwO), this work pushes the edges of qualitative inquiry. Following St. Pierre's call to deconstruct the concepts on which qualitative research is built, this inquiry troubles the I/we of authorship and linear meaning making as it examines the tattooed body functioning as becoming a BwO. The nodal ethnography is a Deleuzo-Guattarian-based methodological inquiry in which interruptions and layers of narrative are used to create spaces for conversation between my multinodes. The tattoos on my semipermeable corporeal flesh tell multilayered stories that are constantly moving and shifting, and I (re)make meaning of these stories within, amongst, and between the nodes that constitute this disorganized body while approaching the limits of a BwO, always in progress, becoming. There is no beginning or end, only a middle, made up of lines that can be read in any order, as linearity does not live here. The

Laminar Express iPhone/iPad photography application allowed for the layering of images, text, and color to rupture and even to distort the lines of ink on my body as a plane of representation adds yet another collaborative space to have dialogue(s); thus offering endless possibilities for the nodes of my ethnography to be (re)connected and (re)produced. My tattooed body evokes response from my multiselves as well as from others; ergo, I invite the reader to become a co-collaborator of this nodal ethnography, and to take lines of flight with/in this experimental space of what may appear when tattoos/images/multinodes/selves and storied lines of inked/textured text collide with Deleuzo-Guattarian theory in exploring my tattooed skin as becoming a BwO.

INDEX WORDS: *Qualitative inquiry, Deleuzo-Guattarian inquiry, BwO, Poststructural, Nodal ethnography, Autoethnography, Tattooed body, Becomings*

A NODAL ETHNOGRAPHY OF A (BE)COMING TATTOOED BODY

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KRISTA ANN HILTON

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for the

Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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in

the Department of Educational Policy Studies

in

the College of Education and Human Development
Georgia State University

Atlanta, GA
2016

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this research study to my past, present, and future self. Krista, take the time to read through this at least once or twice more over the course of your life to remind yourself of what you have achieved, and that you are amazing and worthy of this fantastic accomplishment! Congrats to you, Dr. Hilton.

I would also like to dedicate this amazing journey to my dearest friends who mean the world to me! Thanks to their unwavering support, unconditional love, and belief in me to complete this chapter of my life. I am forever grateful! Also, to my sweet pups who were constantly there, literally by my side, as I traveled along this doctoral path. Love you, boys!

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Many, many thanks to Daphne for pivoting this whole experience with her recommendation to switch departments so that I could immerse myself fully in the poststructural work that aligns with my core beliefs. I have so enjoyed you continuing with me, even if it was not how I had initially planned. My special thanks to Teri for sharing her dissertation with me many years ago to validate that poststructural dissertations can and do and should exist within academia. Also a loving thanks to Jonathan for opening my eyes even more to the world of Deleuze and Guattari, and doing it with such compassion and including me in many collaborative journeys that I shall always hold near and dear to my heart.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The abstract machine begins to unfold, to stand to full height, producing an illusion exceeding all strata, even though the machine itself still belongs to a determinate stratum. This is, obviously, the illusion constitutive of man (who does man [*sic*] think he is?). This illusion derives from the overcoding immanent to language itself. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 63)

Introduction to the Problem

¹Tattoos float everywhere and sometimes land on bodies. A few have found a home on my body, penetrating my skin, becoming with and on me. I want to play on this line of tattoos, but how do I begin, for there is no problem per se, just a desire. A *problem* does not exist (Kaufmann, 2011c). Yet I am being pushed by a machine, a mandate to open a problem where none exists. Setting research within a problem is a binary way of thinking and functioning, eliciting that there is a right or wrong way, which has materialist repercussions, judgments that unfold in crevasses and folds. In light of this tension between beginning a research project in an abyss of unsignified and closing off too soon, I begin not with a question, but with a topic of desire, giving myself the comfort of a container in which to play, but not closing that container too tightly before I commence.

Maccormack (2006) wrote, “Tattoos create a new surface of the body as text. This surface has been represented, interpreted, de-signified and discursively exposed as an external articulation of some internal essence of the body upon which the tattoo is inscribed” (p. 57). Tattoos as an internal essence inscribed on the body have landed in academia, but they are folded from the start. Coming from a sociological perspective of research developed by having spent many years enmeshed in ethnographic empirical work within the tattoo community, as well as

¹ This document was created by and is best viewed using Adobe Acrobat Pro DC

becoming part of the tattoo community, there are the notable works of Sanders (1988, 2009) as well as Sanders and Vail (2008). Resonating more from a psychoanalyzing space, the research of Resenhoeft, Villa, and Wiseman (2008) and Wiseman (2010) focused around the surveying of college students' perceptions of female tattooed individuals. Broadening the scope of assessing the perceptions of master's level business students, Totten, Lipscomb, and Jones' (2009) research included both tattooed female and male bodies. While the bulk of the results contributed to a more pathological narrative, Totten et al.'s study yielded positive outcomes in "that the majority of the university business majors comprising the sample not only do not harbor negative attitudes or stereotypes toward persons with body art but, in fact, express many positive attributions" (p. 53). While my work does not align with these paradigms, these studies have helped me to become this work.

Shifting theoretical focus to a more postmodern tilt of research focused on tattooed skin/bodies, the works of DeMello (2000), Sullivan (2001), Atkinson (2002), and Pitts (2003) come to mind. While each researcher varied in the amount of time spent with/in the tattoo community as an interviewer at conventions or local tattoo shops, female tattooed bodies were always their subjects/participants. While DeMello, Sullivan, and Pitts as well tended to operate more from a posty lens, Atkinson tended to lean more toward an anthropological/sociological positioning within his work. However, the overarching importance of all of these female tattooed narratives is that they operated with the intention to create a space for these stories to be told by the tattooed individuals themselves, rather than based on the perceptions of others.

Amidst the literature, the poststructural tattoo auto/narratives of Spry (2000), Barbour (2011), and Khalil (2003) inform my work by providing the plateau from which I want this dissertation to unfold in later chapters. These texts are provided as examples of how tattoo narratives can collide, often quite abstractly with Deleuze and Guattari (1987), concurrently

filling holes and creating gaps, which is therefore where my work expands and collapses upon itself. Finding a personal connection to how Spry related to her skin operating as narratives, in that “I believe I exist somewhere amid the sociopolitical narratives written on my body” (p. 84), combined with sharing similar desires with Barbour, whose dissertation was fueled by her lifelong “interest in becoming tattooed” (p. 158), propels me to take flight in exploring my tattooed skin as becoming. For this work is, by definition, a becoming, and becomings are directional. Jackson (2010) stated that, “Becoming is the movement through a unique event that produces experimentation and change” (p. 581). A becoming is a deterritorializing of that which is often perceived the norm (i.e., the structure), thus, “a potential, creative and created” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 106), which is different from the norm.

Grabbing lines of literature to collaborate in becoming a plateau, Maccormack’s (2006) work helped me bridge the gap between tattooed bodies and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977, 1987) concept of bodies without organs (BwO). Maccormack’s piece explored how the tattooed body created a plane out of its differences, and I find inspiration in her focus on “tattooed bodies without organs (BwO)” (pp. 60–64). She defined the BwO as “a space within a body, one body...collective of persons as a political body” (Maccormack, 2006, p. 61). Because a tattooed body (dis)organizes a corporeal body, and “because the tattoos are not read as part of the traditional organization of the body...a tattooed body is an experiment without a hypothesis” (Maccormack, 2006, p. 61).

For me, an experiment without a hypothesis is a haecceity, an unfolding event, always fleeting, a BwO (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). ~ *It is here that I am bringing together haecceity, BwO, and the notion of an experiment without a hypothesis in the sense that each is in some way, a becoming. Thus, perhaps each having this aspect of becoming is the fragment/shard that binds these concepts. For me, this/my tattooed body is a plethora of events, culminating in to the*

approximation of becoming a tattooed body. ~ This BwO, introduced by Deleuze and Guattari (1977) in “Anti-Oedipus,” most often possesses organs, especially in reference to the human body. While the body contains a plethora of organs, it is, however, the structure that these organs impose on the body that the BwO resists—the organism/body itself thus becomes a *judgment of God* and therefore folds back on the BwO, causing it to howl in anguish. This folding and unfolding promotes a constant motion, approximating the becoming of this/my tattooed body.

For the BwO is all of that: necessarily a Place, necessarily a Plane, necessarily a Collectivity (assembling elements, things, plants, animals, tools, people, powers, and fragments of all of these: for it is not “my” body without organs, instead the “me” (moi) is on it, or what remains of me, unalterable and changing in form, crossing thresholds). (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 161)

This dissertating tattoo piece is (co)constructed with the same intention rendered in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) “A Thousand Plateaus,” to be read in a rhizomatic fashion, for a rhizome is/functions as a tuberistic system in which there is no beginning or end, only a (constant) middle making indefinite connections, so the reader can start and stop reading wherever s/he so desires. Poststructural writing tends to resonate from the middle (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), and as such will not provide an abundance of guidance and direction on how to read it—this is purposeful on my part as I resonate from a poststructural space in how I live my life, see the world, and function as an academician. Because...within this dissertation, I write to experiment with my tattooed body as becoming, through the concept of BwO. This work is opened for dialogue with myself, with my committee members, with Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1987), and with the reader to experience my tattoo narratives within, between, and amongst. While lines of literature (Barbour, 2011; Khalil, 2003; Maccormack, 2006; Spry, 2000) have provided springboards for this work, I have yet to see anything that unfolds a multilayered tattooed body becoming.

Significance/Purpose

I/we are always working, moving, approximating something, as I am in constant motion, constant flow. So what desires(s) am I flowing toward? While (re)curing ideas resonate within me and between my lines of text—I continue to hear Deleuze and Guattari, and becomings, (co)collaboration (~ *oh, how I long to write a collaborative dissertation tangibly* [Gale, Speedy, & Wyatt, 2010], *then remind myself everything/everyone collides, we never write a/lone* [Foucault, 2001] ~), and BwOs. Out of the unfolding of my desire, arises both my purpose and my research question, which is to explore how does my/a tattooed body function as becoming a BwO (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, 1987).

This work unfolds within/on the growing body of tattoo-based narrative research, in order to become on a line of a tattooed BwO. Deleuze (1995) highlighted in “Negotiations,” while drawing on Leibniz’s work, the importance of worlds to come—perhaps even with an inclination to/of better worlds “because it allows the production and introduction of new elements” (p. 161). This work is a line in creating a better world to come through experimenting with becoming BwOs. Given that this dissertation as a whole is a becoming, constantly changing and emanating from the middle, this experimentation of my tattooed body functioning as becoming a BwO is necessary because “as it unfolds, branches out, and mutates, inspires a need to keep on creating new concepts, not through any external determinism but through a becoming that carries the problems themselves along with it” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 149).

In this becoming that carries problems along, I find myself channeling Prosser (2001) for inspiration and support, “Autobiography (read here as similar to nodal ethnography for this purpose) works like a skin; it is the skin the author sends out that at once conceals and reveals the self. Skin autobiographies form an alternative skin” (p. 65). This explanation lends itself beautifully to creating a visual/tangible representation to the lines of my tattooed skin, albeit a

plane of an alternative skin as Prosser purported, with engraved lines of ink that at one point never existed and then at another point are not only present but are also part of the skin. There are glimpses of my flesh tones amidst the vivid colors, but even without these colorful lines, skin is ever changing, always shedding cells that constantly yield alternative skins (Chopra, 1993). What a beautiful place to unfold the colliding of Deleuzo-Guattarian theory and concept(s) amidst the lines of tattoo works, to crash upon my semipermeable corporeal shell whirling around a nodal ethnographic playground of text, images, and videos. In Jonathan's writings to Ken in Gale and Wyatt (2007), he mentioned that, "But maybe the story will write me" (p. 789). Perhaps most of all that is my wish of what I may contribute with my work—that in taking my fleeting self out of the empty signifying pool from which it blindly swims, these segmented lines upon my body may tell multiplicitous stories of the fragments of me, especially as they envelope and viscerally experience theory at this time of my academic journey.

Rupturing the binaries of more and/or less than, through (re)creating something different, I posit myself amidst the malleable fragments and layers of Deleuze and Guattari and play with nodal ethnography as my methodology—a methodology that shapes (co)created collaborative spaces of narrative within me and the reader(s)' multinodes/selves in order to explore my purpose. I do this within a playful, colorful, experimental space of segmented and ruptured lines and colors that appear on the surface of my semipermeable corporeal shell as tattoos. Finding my poststructural home in academia, one that situates the way in which I see, feel, and navigate the world, is the greatest gift ever on this doctoral journey. Spending most of my time as a graduate student feeling a bit (dis)connected from the structures and language of academia, I found a theoretical space that stutters and collides with the structures of most institutions in Western society, and it is in this space that I clearly hear my voice. This dissertation is a semilinear turned multidimensional experimental space of what may appear when tattoos/images/multinodes/

selves, and storied lines of inked/textured text collide with Deleuzo-Guattarian theory in exploring my tattooed skin as becoming a BwO. ~ *With the word collide comes a halt in the conversation, a feeling of separation in that with such a collision of tattoos, of theory, of text, that such items are discrete before and after said collision. I reflect on this juxtaposition and realize that within this time/space and discussion of such concepts that I find I am challenged in completely operating outside of the discreteness that is this and that, and I wonder if there is a better word/phrase to create the visual and visceral effect of all of these things being different and changed and an amalgamation of each other after such a collision occurs? While I can both see and feel this effect, language escapes me now. ~*

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Having him inscribe a number of pieces on my own body it became obvious that tattooing at this level was more about art than craft, more about aesthetics than deviance, more about collecting than nose thumbing. (Sanders, 2009, p. 71)

Tattooed Bodies

A trailblazer in tattoo research, Sanders (2009) reflected on his decade long ethnographic submersion into the culture of tattooing from the late 1970s through late 1980s whilst *becoming a tattooed person*, suffice it to say a tattooed academic, even. Delving into this work not necessarily from the same pathological striated space as most medical and psychological journals, he admitted that, “I came, then, to see my investigation of tattooing as having to do as much with the sociology of art as it did with the sociology of deviance” (Sanders, 2009, p. 71). In the revised edition of “Customizing the Body,” both Sanders and Vail (2008) provided critiques of body modification/tattoo research that had been conducted since 1989 that continued to pathologize the tattooed community. I found it interesting that while they showed some appreciation for more postmodern work in the area, there seemed to be a privileging of Sanders’s empirically-based original work while the post-narratives were not valued as sound and/or worthy work unless extensive interviews were conducted. The following is an overview of several studies, with ties to academia that for the most part seem to perpetuate stigma and further pathologize marked bodies.

Using a convenience sample of 158 community college students, Resenhoeft et al. (2008) devised two experiments to assess the harmfulness of tattoos on perceptions. Their hypothesis was that their experiments “would show that tattoos negatively affected perceptions” of tattooed

individuals (Resenhoeft et al., 2008, p. 594). The first experiment involved showing a picture of a female model with a black dragon tattoo or the same female model with no tattoo. In Experiment 1, with 85 participants, the students received an attitude survey to distract them. They then either received the control (no tattoo) photo of the female model or the experimental (dragon tattoo) photo of the model in which the tattoo was visible on the upper left arm of the model. The photo was accompanied by a tool to assess 13 personality characteristics of this model. A demographic questionnaire followed. The model with the tattoo was viewed less positive than the model without the tattoo. Statistically significant differences were found to exist “between the model tattoo conditions on 6 of the 13 characteristic ratings” (Resenhoeft et al., 2008, p. 594).

In the second experiment, 73 different students received the same materials as in the first experiment; however, a different photograph was used of a different female model who either did or did not have a small dolphin tattoo on her right shoulder (Resenhoeft et al., 2008). While students viewed the non-tattooed model “as being more honest and religious than did participants shown a model with a tattoo” (Resenhoeft et al., 2008, p. 595), there was also a statistically significant difference noted on two of the personality characteristics for female models with the dolphin tattoo (versus the six noted in Experiment 1). The limitations for both experiments ranged from the female models being dressed differently in each experiment as well as the participants being recruited from the same community college. However, I found it interesting that Resenhoeft et al. (2008) did not include as an additional limitation that they only used photos of female models.

Wiseman (2010), a researcher involved in the Resenhoeft et al. (2008) study, assessed how students’ perceptions and ratings of a female college instructor were influenced by her tattoos. The 128 participating students from psychology classes were presented an attitude scale

consisting of 18 items, a color photograph of a female instructor, descriptive text about this instructor from a colleague, a nine-item characteristic perception scale of the instructor, and a demographic questionnaire. The students received one of four photos: (a) female instructor with no tattoo, (b) female instructor with a cross tattoo, (c) female instructor with a wire tattoo, or (d) female instructor with a cross and wire tattoo. Results showed that “ratings for an instructor with a tattoo (or tattoos) were higher for three of nine characteristics” (Wiseman, 2010, p. 849).

Wiseman concluded that the depicted tattoos partly influenced the perceptions of the students toward the college instructor. However, in this follow up research to Resenhoeft et al. (2008), it was noted that limitations of the study involved a lack of male models as instructors in the photos, as well as only recruiting from one university, thus a small(er) sample size.

Interested in assessing the perceptions of marketing majors, Totten et al. (2009) surveyed 496 students from 14 colleges/universities who were enrolled in a principles of marketing course. While a negative concern motivated the study, within the paradigm of looking at who would be future business managers, Totten et al. sought to “investigate attitudes toward persons with body art” (p. 49). The study’s survey was designed from data collected from three focus groups. Exploratory factor analysis found two factors in the data collected from the survey: negative and positive characteristic associated with persons having body art. The results yielded positive views, in “that the majority of the university business majors comprising the sample not only do not harbor negative attitudes or stereotypes toward persons with body art but, in fact, express many positive attributions” (Totten et al., 2009, p. 53). Women, in particular, received more positive feedback in that there would not be any concern for a visibly tattooed or pierced female representative to interact with clients. However, Totten et al. noted some hesitancy when it came to folks with extensive body art; however, they did not define how that might look.

Looking to draw correlates between perception(s) of nurses' caring, skill, and knowledge and their bodily appearance, Thomas et al. (2010) surveyed a varied group of patients, nurses, nursing students, and nursing faculty members. The participants were presented with the Perception of Nurse Caring, Skill, and Knowledge Questionnaire that Thomas et al. designed. The questionnaire consisted of 18 photographs with the same model/nurse head to control for facial expression. While nine photographs showed the nurse in three different scrubs, the other nine photographs showed a nurse in a solid scrub with three different kinds of body art. Thomas et al. noted that all the participants found those who were pierced and tattooed to be "the least caring, skilled, and knowledgeable, [however] there were differences between group perceptions of knowledge" (p. 495). Contributing to these findings were limitations of the faculty sample size (36 of 62 participants were recruited), as well as the lack of diversity from the two universities and community hospital that were conveniently sampled (Thomas et al., 2010). With this, I now shift our focus from this post-positivist rooted research lens to the body of tattoo works that resonate more from a postmodern lens and beyond.

Tattooed Body as Narrative(s)

DeMello (2000) wrote that, "The tattoo attracts and also repels precisely because it is different" (p. 13). Maccormack (2006) further builds on this notion in that "tattooed skin provokes response, it invites other bodies to fold into it" (p. 77). Perhaps that is all these words constitute, echoes repeated in slightly different ways that eventually fade. DeMello invited the reader into "Bodies of Inscription" through the tattoo narratives of her participants. Collecting the majority of her interview/data at tattoo conventions, and interested in the Western cultural shifts surrounding tattoos, her research focus "was to explore the ways that middle-class participation in the tattoo community has changed both the nature of the community and the meaning of the tattoo" (DeMello, 2000, p. 160). Presenting her research via the tattoo narratives,

I found the themes of “individualism, spirituality, personal growth, sacredness of the body, women’s motivations, and modern primitives” (pp. 161–174) to resonate with the work of Atkinson (2002) and Pitts (2003).

Looking at gender embodiment through tattoos, Atkinson (2002) focused his research on what he found at the time to be a gap in the research—women, but more specifically, Canadian women. After spending 3 years immersing himself in local tattoo shops, he was able to obtain 40 interviews. Referring to the inked work as *body projects*, Atkinson highlighted how these female tattooed bodies were acting as cultural paradigm shifters—“modifying the skin to wage cultural resistance is an act of cultural subversion” (p. 227). His findings echoed Spry’s (2000) declaration that “subverting established reasons for engaging in body projects, these women utilize the tattooed body as a billboard for political protest” (p. 232). The narratives in Atkinson’s work act as veritable decoder rings in the meaning/making of these marked bodies.

Maccormack (2006) invited and inspired that “the tattooed body problematizes binaries of the natural/volitional, surface/interior, discursive and designated” (p. 59). With the “signifying of the skin” (p. 58), Maccormack delved into how structures are inscribed on the body, by relating to the skin as a narrative space. Throughout her piece, she (re)iterated that “the tattoo is an addition to the surface rather than a plane of signification into which we are born” (Maccormack, 2006, p. 59). This is interesting in comparison to how Spry (2000) related to her tattoo on her arm as emerging from layers below, that amidst collaborative dialogue with her tattoo artist, it was as if the tattoo “was writing itself, as if it were surfacing from a space in my body dark and deep” (p. 89). While Maccormack’s piece explored how the tattooed body created a plane out of its differences, I am inspired most by her focus on “tattooed bodies without organs (BwO)” (pp. 60–64), where she defined the BwO as “a space within a body, one body and collective of persons as a political body” (p. 61). Because a tattooed body (dis)organizes a

corporeal body, and “because the tattoos are not read as part of the traditional organization of the body...a tattooed body is an experiment without a hypothesis” (Maccormack, 2006, p. 61). The meanings of tattoos on tattooed bodies constantly change, thus keeping them mobile, thus further highlighting how both the tattooed body and bodies in proximity to it are affecting and being affected. In Deleuzian (1994) fashion to think differently and outside of the box, instead of *who is this (female, black, old) body?*, one asks, “*What is this body doing, to what is it connecting, what new formations is it creating?*” (p. 62).

Folding back into the work of Spry (2000) in her autoethnographic performance piece, she noted that it is a “radically self-reflexive postscript to the celebration of my mother in *Skins*” (pp. 85–86). Spry chronicled her mental breakdown/breakthrough, exhibited in her exclamation that, “I believe I exist somewhere amid the sociopolitical narratives written on my body” (p. 84). The imagery of wearing her dead mother’s mink coat in her performance relayed this *shedding of the skin* notion in “Tattoo Stories.” It is, indeed, an interesting multilayering of wearing her mother’s coat. Visually resonating with the representation of her “body as a billboard” (Spry, 2000, p. 86), as I realize I have done perhaps more vibrantly than others with my tattoos, I appreciated Spry’s raw vulnerability of shedding her layers on the stage to, in turn, provide glimpses of her tattoo.

From one performance piece to another, I now unfold onto Barbour (2011). Reflecting on why she took issue with being asked about her tattoo more than her dreads, she wrote, “How can I, as a feminist, artist, and educator, ignore the opportunity to engage in discussion and provide alternative perspectives about tattooing” (Barbour, 2011, p. 155). Next to Sanders (1988, 2009), Vail (2008), and Spry (2000), Barbour is one of the few academics that actually made a connection to being a tattooed academic. In her reflective chapter on being tattooed, Barbour spoke of desire—mainly a fascination with tattooing that dated back to her childhood—and how

it led her to the creation of her dissertation. Barbour wrote, “My feminist choreographic research helped me focus on my embodied convictions, adding momentum to my interest in becoming tattooed” (p. 158). While gaining more clarity about the many layers that constitute Barbour, both professionally and personally through writing (see Gale & Wyatt, 2010), I respect Barbour’s candidness and empathize with her in that “what is more surprising I suppose is that I find it challenging to speak about being tattooed” (p. 161).

Khalil (2003) invited me into “A writing in points: Autobiography and the poetics of the tattoo.” In this article, Khalil wrote a semi-autobiography about two novels written by Abdelkebir Khatibi. The first novel addressed Khatibi’s travels and childhood. Khalil looked at the first novel as a sociological reflection of space. Khalil highlighted how this novel operated within and between grey space(s), thus contributing to its “curvilinear” (p. 20) style of storytelling. Khalil noted the French influence in Morocco (which is where Khatibi is from) among other colonizing attributes, “These are some of the reasons that I have read Khatibi’s novel as a novel about coping with post-coloniality through a creation of a new space” (p. 21). This new space, one that affords freedom from patriarchy, hierarchy, power, control, and molar lines is a non-space, or rather a smooth/desert space; which actually abstractly represents the tattoo. Khalil noted, “This consciousness that the world of his childhood was divided into twin and rivaling worlds leads the narrator to seek an alternative space for reflection” (p. 29).

I return to Khatibi’s second novel “Tattoo: A writing in points.” Having navigated the hegemonic spaces/people of his youth, Khatibi’s body howls, inhaling pain, exhaling joy, inhaling joy, and exhaling pain, and, and, and...(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Khalil (2003) reported that, “Seeking a space of writing outside of the written word, reliant as it is on the binaries he felt as a prison, he finds the abstract semiotics of the tattoo” (p. 29). In studying the Moroccan tattoo, Khatibi opened up to this pure, free space of desert writing that was outside the

confines of structure and rigidity. The tattoos, as well as writing, appeared to serve as plateaus of reflection and freedom.

Deleuze and Guattari: Body Without Organs (BwO)

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote that, “Paintings, tattoos, or marks on the skin embrace the multidimensionality of bodies” (p. 176). Atop it we sit, stand, walk, sleep, eat, live. The Earth, perhaps the most tangible body without organs (BwO) that we can wrap our heads around in this linear space. It is on this Earth that we desire, and “on it we love” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 149). A BwO, it is important to note, most often possesses organs, especially in reference to the human body. While the body contains a plethora of organs, it is, however, the structure which these organs impose on the body that the BwO resists—the organism/body itself thus becomes this *judgment of God* and therefore folds back on the BwO causing it to howl in anguish. In “A Thousand Plateaus,” Deleuze and Guattari focused primarily on the set of practices or the limit of the BwO; however, the text has a tendency to be quite tangential in the paths taken to provide an overview, further highlighting its rhizomatic nature.

One can never fully attain the state of being a BwO, as it is a limitation, and one can only approximate that limit. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote that, “If the BwO is a limit, if one is forever attaining it, it is because behind each stratum, encasted in it, there is always another stratum” (p. 159). The strata that Deleuze and Guattari are referring to here are the surface of the organism, the angle of signification, and subjectification. Therefore, perhaps seeking some sort of zone of balance with the fragmented pieces of the strata is a positive space to attain, especially when taking the following into consideration: “Staying stratified—organized, signified, subjected—is not the worst that can happen; the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back down on us heavier than ever”

(Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 161). So experiment, swing between the strata like you would on a jungle gym, and catch lines of flight.

Perhaps these tattooed/inked lines represent the intensities that flow across/populate the becoming BwO so as to fill it with pleasure rather than emptying it. Some examples provided to express when the body starts to get tired of its organs are highlighted through the hypochondriac body, the paranoid body, the schizo body, the drugged body, and the masochist body. A BwO is a (dis)organized body; hence, there is no need to think about organs in the sense of being necessary for survival—for the organs in the body are structure, put there to provide a more linear structure to the corporeal shell, which is the body on this plane. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) wrote, “The BwO is opposed not to the organs but to that organization of the organs called the organism” (p. 158). Organization, structure, oppression causes bodies to fold back on themselves until the body howls. By being folded, it is no longer the self; it has been imposed upon and has become a puppet of structure/State. The self I speak of here is the Westernized perception of the signifier known as the individual, I, the ego-motivated being that operates in a reality of separate/ness. The assemblage of State (perhaps in this case academia with tattooed academic bodies) noted, “You will be signifier and signified, interpreter and interpreted—otherwise you’re just a deviant” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 159). Hence, the BwO resists this thinking, and in this piece does so via the (re)production of the tattooed BwO. I envision tattoos as vibrational intensities, constantly flowing, approximating the limits of a filled BwO with (re)creating and (re)structuring (tattoo) images/pieces; therefore constituting an *organic* construction of a non-prescribed hierarchically organized body (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). It would appear that there are indeed multiplicities of bodies present with/in this (body of) constantly changing work.

Two phases are related to the BwO. One involves turning your body into a BwO that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) referred to as “fabrication” (p. 151), and the other involves the flow of intensities/waves over the surface of the BwO. When I reflect on the hypochondriac, paranoid, schizo, drugged, and masochistic bodies, I must ask the following of each: “What type is it, how is it fabricated; [and] what are its modes, what comes to pass” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 151). For there must be constant motion, a flow(ing) of intensities, across the BwO or it will be emptied rather than filled. For my interpretation of a filled BwO is one that has intensities flowing across it. The BwO is at zero intensity. Deleuze and Guattari wrote, “The modes are everything that comes to pass: waves and vibrations, migrations, thresholds and gradients, intensities produced in a given type of substance starting from a given matrix” (p. 153). It is all energy, and as a basic law of physics, energy can neither be created nor destroyed. I have always found an interesting connection between Deleuze and Guattari and quantum physics—thinking this way allows me to visualize energy moving across a plane (of consistency, a desert, a plateau, a [becoming tattooed] BwO). St. Pierre (2011) stated, “Quantum physics seems quite Nietzschean and Deleuzian, and here we see that Science and Philosophy do not have to be at odds” (p. 619).

The BwO is a beautiful, abstract representation of how poststructural theory functions in the world:

The body without organs, the unproductive, the unconsumable, serves as a surface for the recording of the entire process of production of desire, so that desiring-machines seem to emanate from it in the apparent objective movement that establishes a relationship between the machines and the body without organs. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 11)

In light of this, we can start to fathom how poststructuralism is similar to the surface of the BwO, wherein it refuses organization; however, this organization fuels the capitalistic production machines from which poststructuralism is afforded the opportunity to work within

and between. There is beauty in becoming, in being stratified so as to reflect on the gray/fragmented multiplicities, and in “mimicking the strata” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 160). Although the perception of “the full body without organs is the unproductive, the sterile, the unengendered, the unconsumable” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 8), I cannot help but shift my perception(s) in that the intensities/flows of the overlapping becoming tattooed BwO is in its own (re)production part of a subverting paradigm that therefore ruptures the ways of thinking and knowing and at the same time pushes the production limits of scholarly writing.

Pitts (2003) stated that, “One of the problems with dismissing the body, though, is that it is also an important site of desire and pleasure” (p. 90). Desire—“The BwO is desire” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 165). My attention wanders to Deleuze and Guattari’s (1977) “Anti-Oedipus,” where the BwO is introduced. Deleuze and Guattari quoted the philosopher Antonin Artaud, who was the first to mention BwO, as he found “himself with no shape or form whatsoever, right there where he was at that moment” (p. 8). It is this body that, regarding capitalism and our society in general, does not serve to produce or consume. This BwO is not part of a machine, therefore, antagonizing the system in (dis)organizing the assemblage that is our society, government, and schools—the assemblages of power, control, linearity, and binarism. Deleuze and Guattari (1977) wrote that,

Desiring machines make us an organism; but at the very heart of this production, within the very production of this production, the body suffers from being organized in this way, from not having some other sort of organization, or no organization at all. (p. 8)

The BwO is an “imageless, organless body, the nonproductive” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 8). However, there are machines all around us (for example, the academic machine Barbour, Spry, Sanders, and myself are *becoming tattooed* members), and “in order to resist organ-machines, the body without organs presents its smooth, slippery, opaque, taut surface as a barrier” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 9). The BwO is a revolutionary, in that it is a

“deterritorialized socius” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 33). The job of the socius (for example, the socius is a set of academic/tenure-based laws) “has always been to codify the flows of desire, to inscribe them, to record them, to see to it that no flow exists that is not properly dammed up, channeled, regulated” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, p. 33). Desire is flow. It is here that the tattooed body becoming/BwO is deconstructing the structure that exists, smoothing out the rigid, striated lines of hegemony, and not inhibiting nor regulating the flows. The BwO is at this edge of operating within and without of a “social formation” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 161).

CHAPTER 3

(NON)CONCLUSION

Alas, we find ourselves once more on a landing page that is neither the end, nor the beginning, yet always the veritable middle (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), despite what the title may illicit. Operating within this poststructural construct, the discussion of becoming a tattooed body should never come to a close, as it will unequivocally continue to unfold differently regarding who, where, and when the text is read in time. For not only are the hyper-modal tattoo images in this dissertation becomings, they are yet another layer of representation that illustrates this constantly changing colorfully inked body that will always be approximating the becoming tattooed body.

That's fascinating to me, to be able to see all of these layerings of all of these becomings which are the back of my body with the side of my body and my arm, but within this multilayered image, it all seems as if it's arriving in and out of, coming through my left arm. ([Interview 7](#)/10:29)

The Post-(Non)Conclusion

Welcome to the post-middle, co-constructed amidst conversations that unfolded within my doctoral defense (*~ defense is such an institutional, binaristic word, that elicits right or wrong rigidities to which I do not care to directionally participate in...in fact, I refuse. However, I posited that my committee and others in attendance have a dissertation conversation to construct a space for further co-creation. It was beautiful ~*). Several items surfaced during the further dialogues about this becoming, all with the common line of flight surrounding boundaries and vulnerability. Sharing in written form, as well as aurally, a poststructural nodal ethnography is a very raw, and oft times beyond personal in the sentiments that are shared, the stories that arise, and the dark holes that one may go down before they have even realized they are here and there. As such, with the plethora of layers that you, me, and I witness in this space, do not expect

that you will walk away knowing all that was, is, and will continue to be this experience for myself/selves.

My Refusals

I refuse...to bring everything to the page to divulge, for perhaps it will surface on other plateaus personally and professionally, and maybe not.

I refuse...to talk about the black holes I plummeted down and as quickly climbed out of, as I have unabashedly shared enough layers of my multiselves to co-create this becoming.

I refuse...to not have boundaries for my selves as a writer, as a poststructuralist theorist, and as a human—even as fleeting as those boundaries may be in this ever-changing space.

I refuse...to become a spectacle of other as we are all one.

May I/we become part of this journey!

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

I am not certain how others will document their becoming, but I have chosen structures that suit my disposition, theoretical orientation, and writing life. (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 967)

Epistemology/Theoretical Framework

Moved by the Deleuzian collaborative work of Wyatt, Gale, Gannon, and Davies (2011), which is written in plateaus similar to Deleuze and Guattari's (1987), "A Thousand Plateaus," Wyatt et al. (2011) operated from an immanent plane from which they were able to fold and unfold between and within each other's becoming with Deleuze as well as the reader(s). I hear them echoing, "How might I comprehend Being in new ways through listening to you inside the fold of your experience" (Wyatt et al., 2011, pp. 3–4).

My way(s) of thinking are changing because of this dance with him. I resonate in the space of Deleuze's noted black holes to satiate the desire in continuing to see my (ever)changing self/selves. I revel at the thought of getting lost in translation and discussion with colleagues about which lines of flight I have taken, and will I know when to board the next flight or will it happen effortlessly. I feel as though I have found my theoretical niche in his words, and it is here that I continue on my slippery slope of personal, spiritual, and professional (self)discovery. I get him even when I do not; I wish others felt that way about me. Quite honestly, Deleuze's processes dance rhythmically through the lines and nodes that make up my semicorporeal being even more so when it appears that I am struggling to make meaning(s) of these ideas. Kaufmann (2011c) wrote, "This is because that which does not fit under the concept, although always there, is ignored and made invisible" (p. 149). I go to bed with his words vibrating through my fingertips; I fall asleep on my plane of consistency longing for my conscious awakening in the morning when I can pick up "A Thousand Plateaus," so that the words can make sense of the

conundrum that is (re)produced as my world. I am a walking fragmented contradiction, distracted and inspired by language and meaning and structure and the lack thereof, and I desire to break free from it all, and just...be. And so it is! But what does this *breaking free* mean? What does it look, smell, and taste like? A nodal ethnography is my escape, my breaking free of the striations of traditional thinking, operating, and writing. My intention is that this (dis)organized, different, and fragmented visual and textual substantive piece using the nodal ethnography as the methodology will provide another vision and (re)production of what poststructural thinking can look and sound like. Also, while I will likely never know the degree to which you experience it as unfolding, hopefully it will at least viscerally move you in some way to think differently.

Methodology

A nodal ethnography is a dynamic, intertwined mixture of narrative, theory, and poststructural-based (read as malleable, nonhierarchical, circular, seeing, and knowing differently from one moment to the next with the possibility of multiple truths running rampant) collaborative writing on yet another plateau in creating space(s) for endless dialogue between my multinodal selves, as well as providing an interactive space for the reader(s) to also be author(s) (Wyatt et al., 2011), reader(s), or perhaps author(s)-reader(s). St. Pierre (2004) wrote, “What is exciting for those who plug a Deleuzian machine into another machine is that different assemblages become possible” (p. 284). This method of inquiry allows constant experimentation, to push the limits further of what scholarly writing can look like, and what it can do (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). For I am my “own little machine, ready when needed to be plugged in to other collective machines” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 179). This method possesses similar fragments to Gale and Wyatt (2010) in that,

As we reflect upon our “method,” it seems that we are working with a desire to be productive, to think differently and to create concepts that are new. As we live,

breathe, create, and re-create our body-without-organs we are aware that it is also a “desiring-machine.” (p. 37)

Maccormack (2006), with her prick at rupturing the binaristic tattooed body perceptions present in past research, created a crevasse, created a gap for my nodal ethnography in the following: “Like tattooed bodies in sociology, women’s bodies in philosophy and psychoanalysis are more often spoken about than heard speaking for themselves” (p. 65). I (as in the autoethnographic *I* that Spry (2000) touches upon) will be creating a multilayered space for my multiselves/nodes to discuss and explore my tattooed body as becoming. Pitts’ (2003) words vibrate intensely across my body, and I shall not forget that this tattooed shell of mine, is indeed, “an important site of desire and pleasure” (p. 90).

The reflection of my process, my becoming, is thus set in motion by a collaborative work, amidst my nodes of (re)reading my tattooed body as becoming via a nodal ethnography. Hilton (2011) wrote that, “This conglomerate of nodes has its own words—I, me, my, you, your—with which to make meaning; hence, the nodes are perceived as somewhat multiselves” (p. 354). The nodal ethnography is a Deleuzo-Guattarian-based methodological inquiry that I (re)created, in which “[I] use a multilayered dialogue of narrative and *interruptions* to provide a conversational space between [my] plethora of nodes” (Hilton, 2011, p. 353). In this piece, I (re)make meaning of my journey as a researcher at the doctoral level within, amongst, and between the nodes (i.e., me, you, academia, Deleuze and Guattari, my committee members) that constitute my (dis)organized body within the assemblage of academia, as well as nodes that make up my co-participants over the years.

Perhaps it helps, in this moment, to visualize multitudinous, limitless amounts of nodes making up a bodied, semicorporeal, shelled person. With this, for example, I may then speak of my academic node, which may overlap with my spiritual node, that could then be colliding with

my lesbian node—whilst all of my nodes “affect and are affected” (Boundas, 2005, p. 130) by the incalculable nodes that have informed, changed, and shaped my thinking over time. This being said, we are all one and fade and fold in and out of each other concurrently. The plethora of nodes of my co-participants that have intersected my said body over the years have varied from 13–60 year olds, White, Black, Other, straight, non-straight, trans, bisexual, queer, gay, lesbian, son, daughter, lower through upper class, middle and high schoolers, adult literacy learners, lovely beings from across the United States. We, as I speak here of my/selves and my participants in previous research studies, through my poststructural lens, are constituted of endless nodes/selves. I make sense of and envision making the possible connection between nodes and atoms, as they/we are atomic material(s), and these nodes still have structural ties laden on them by and as a result of Westernized structures. Furthermore, discussion of atoms is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Perhaps I will broach those connections if/when this work implodes. Ergo, that is likely imminent.

While there may only be one article out there that (re)creates the concept of nodal ethnography, there are plenty of rhizomatic lines from which this line of flight fragmented. The nomad/(auto)biographical works of St. Pierre (2000), Gale and Wyatt (2008), and Wyatt (2010) come to mind without hesitation. In “Nomadic Inquiry in the Smooth Spaces of the Field,” St. Pierre took me on this journey of (re)collection in looking back on her dissertation data collection. While she had spent copious amounts of time in the field, in this case her hometown, in this piece she finds herself as more of “an armchair ethnographer unsure of her destination” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 258). My style of inquiry and writing resonate with what she describes as a nomadic ethnographer, operating here and then there, fragmented with regards to time and space, “without defining transitions and paths to connect those points into a fiercely ordered grid of striations” (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 264).

Fragments of Wyatt's (2010) piece collide with me, my writing, my writing that is me, or perhaps even the self/selves that is/are me becoming through this writing, as his work is laden with *interruptions* as he stutters through his process of reflecting and mourning his fathers passing. Wyatt wrote, "I write (to) you both to get some distance from you, to see you on the page, to get you out of my head, and to draw you to me, to try to hold you" (p. 501). How very poignant and multilayered, as I feel his writing in relationship to his father resonates with the relationship between my nodes, to put my multiselves on the page for all and none to see, and to explore the ruptures and revel in the spaces between (Gale & Wyatt, 2008). The multilayers of healing, becoming writer, living through writer are all occurring at the same time. There is no and/or, only and, and, and...

Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) explored this notion of writing as inquiry, insofar as to support poststructural writers and thinkers. In this piece, they offered encouragement in that "poststructuralism, then, permits—even invites or incites—us to reflect on our method and to explore new ways of knowing" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 962). While there are no (pre)determined models for poststructural writing/inquiry (St. Pierre, 2011), for "each researcher and each study requires different writing" (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 971), I revel in St. Pierre's (2000) honesty in the painful beauty of what it is to be a posty academic. She wrote of her struggles to put together an introduction as well as a conclusion, as there are no starting and end points. Highlighting the uncertainty yet excitement of where her writing may take her, she noted, "I may have to write harder, and you may have to read harder" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 265). And so I write, amidst my nodes, to (re)create meaning(s), to rupture, to trouble, to continually add to and therefore change the assemblage and production of knowledge, and to seek new spaces in doing so (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Gale & Wyatt, 2010; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; St. Pierre, 2004).

Gale and Wyatt (2007) reflected upon their collaborative work as creating space(s) for multiselves to come to life, “This is what is so exciting yet so tantalizing about this writing; we write to fill the spaces between us and yet sense that we never will” (p. 803). I am reminded of Gannon’s (2006) examination of poststructural autobiographies regarding the works of Cixious, Barthes, and Derrida in which she talks of the fragmented multiselves that each theorist writes of, about, and from. Gannon wrote, “In different ways, they displace the speaking self that is the subject, object, and the (im)possible production of autoethnography” (p. 491). St. Pierre’s (2004) struggle(s) surface in not being able to (nor wanting?) to separate herself out from researcher, subject, and participant. While I perceive there to be a lack of true self, at the same time (in flowing with my description of a nodal ethnography) I believe there to be multiselves. In light of this, you will notice my interchangeable use of the words multinodal and multiselves, which have similar meanings to me.

I would be remiss in not acknowledging the qualitative moments/trails that have been blazed to allow the space for my current nodal ethnographic work. Reflecting on Denzin and Lincoln’s (2005) qualitative moments, it seems that while the posty nature of the nodal ethnography represents fragments of each of the eight moments a good bit of it traverses inside, outside, around, and through the fractured/future moment/space. This is highlighted in the nonlinear, narrative(s) with(in) narrative(s), that both constitute and breakdown the process(es) that is/are the (re)creation of a (nodal)ethnography. As well as nomadically wandering into a crisis of representation within its inherent nature to be written and read in (dis)connected (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011), plateau-like ways (see Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Wyatt et al., 2011). Denzin and Lincoln (2011), in addressing the moments of qualitative research, continuously provided support for the outside-of-the-box poststructuralist thinking that is highlighted and recreated through nodal ethnography. Denzin and Lincoln wrote, “We are in a new age where messy,

uncertain multi-voiced text, cultural criticism, and new experimental works will become more common, as will more reflexive forms of field work, analysis, and intertextual representation” (p. 15). Posited within the crisis of representation, poststructuralism operates within the grey (perhaps even blurred) spaces, and offers the author and reader(s) the opportunity to reflect in the middle (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In line with muddying the waters, Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2011) touched on poststructural (re)creations in looking at the slippery slopes of experiences of/by the researcher.

Perhaps another word for a nodal ethnographer is a poststructural “narrative bricoleur” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 6). In this case, it would (re)semble one who interweaves the lines of flight, nodes, and narratives from the spaces between. What a vivid, multidimensional matrix/quilt that would (re)produce within the striated spaces of academia. The directions to nomadically traverse would be (end)less, with the (only) variable being the speed with which eyes, fingers, and multiselves could travel within and between the digital, textual, and visual page(s) of both linear pages and nonlinear spatial nodes. I do not know that this is what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) had in mind when defining the researcher as bricoleur; however, I appreciate how it could be used to think differently about the social science knowledge (re)searcher during this time (which is fleeting as you read this). Reterritorialize and deterritorialize, again, and again, and again... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

It is these fragmented disconnects, that are the (never)ending processes that constitute the becoming writer, the becoming researcher, the becoming and, and, and. These interruptions/disconnects also seem to focus as ruptures in my thinking and I see Britzman (1995) in “The Question of Belief: Writing Poststructural Ethnography,” reflecting on poststructural ethnographic representations as “provocations that disturb the impulse to settle meanings” (p. 236). I cannot help but feel further supported that the methodology of the nodal ethnography is

an ongoing process of writing to disturb and trouble the fixedness of structures/binaries. Similar to St. Pierre's (2000) emphasis on reading harder, Britzman suggested that new boundaries can/will be formed by readers within this poststructural writing to allow for the (re)production of and (re)organization of structures that constitute pushing the bounds of reading and writing.

In the wake of poststructuralism, the assumption that there is no single "truth"—that all truths are but partial truths; that the slippage between signifier and signified in linguistic and textural terms creates representations that are only and always shadows of the actual people, events, and places; that identities are fluid rather than fixed—leads us ineluctably toward the insight that there will be no single "conventional" paradigm to which all social scientists might ascribe in some common terms and with mutual understanding. (Lincoln et al., 2011, p. 125)

The existence, the creation of the nodal ethnography is itself a contestation, even a rebellious incantation, to what *science* and *scholarly writing* are deemed to be within the academy and per educational/governmental assemblage rhetoric. While I have been making the connection of Deleuze and poststructural thinking to quantum physics for quite a while (mainly in the margins of "A Thousand Plateaus" and "Anti-Oedipus"), St. Pierre (2011) recently made the written connection in the support of poststructural research and writing in a time when language fails those not in power, and also remains the source of defining knowledge for those who (perceivably) have the power (high-stakes testing). St. Pierre wrote, "Space-time from physics is dynamic, fractured, porous, paradoxical, and non-individual with sets of space-time relations existing simultaneously, rhizomatically and overlapping, interfering with each other" (p. 619). This sounds nodal and poststructural to me, as well as discontinuous, fragmented, and ruptured! Always becoming. In light of this, it seems that poststructural autoethnographies, or more specifically a nodal ethnography which has similar shards, provides "a constant practice of reflexive attention to the past, present, and future moments of subjectification within complex and contradictory discursive arenas" (Gannon, 2006, p. 480).

Poststructural writing is fragmented; fragmented writing of the fragments that constitute *me*. However, if you allow yourself to be immersed in the (never)ending process that is/can be poststructural writing, if you allow yourself to get lost in the murky grey space between space(s), you may be surprised how, when you let go, your body will go...with...the...flow. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) talked about traditional academic writing being abandoned by new researchers and faculty, flowing into the spaces of conference presentations, publications, and grabbing hold of nomadic graduate students who resonate in producing, writing, and thinking differently. I believe I have arrived in this space, as a nodal ethnographic graduate student storyteller.

Methods

In the chapters of this multilayered, image-based narrative work, you will see that many interruptions [(re)presented in ~ *italics* ~] will appear. These interruptions are thoughts, feelings, reactions, and reflections of my multiselves with my multiselves that serve many functions and often many functions at once. They disrupt, trouble, (re)create tension, rupture, and provide a means of reflection, allowing space for conversations within conversations of my multinodes colliding (see Hilton, 2011). The intentions here, at this moment, are to add both another layer of conversation intertextually, as well as providing snapshots of the process, the becoming, if you will (Gale & Wyatt, 2008), of this dissertation. This text will further highlight my struggle(s) to separate out my multiselves/nodes, as well as the words and thoughts of my committee members and Deleuze and Guattari alike. My words, combined with those of my committee members, constantly collide and mesh, and as Gale and Wyatt (2010) talked of their Jonathan becoming Ken/Ken becoming Jonathan experiences, this dissertation resonates similarly for me. I often find it hard to recognize my own writing (sounds like separate a bit, rearing its head again), perhaps because my words are not my own. They are a beautiful, disjointed, colorful blend of Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1987), Gale and Wyatt (2007, 2008, 2010), Kaufmann (2011a,

2011b), St. Pierre (2000, 2004, 2011), myself (Hilton, 2011), and, and, and. Perhaps you and I will intersect in these spaces, as well. For we [read as me, the committee members, Deleuze and Guattari, and the reader(s)] are multiplicitous and one, at the same time, constantly moving and shifting, and with each directional change, a becoming.

Method(s) of Generation/Method(s) of Analysis

Two methods of data generation are used in this work: photo manipulation and videos. The photos are presented as images and the videos were recorded and transcribed. My method(s) for meaning making are the two methods of data generation. The data generation is the analysis in this work. As previously discussed, there is no traditional problem in this work, so, too, is there no traditional form of analysis. There is no meaning to be found, per se; only that which emerges in different ways through the colliding of photos and videos. As occurs often in poststructural work, there tend always to be overlapping folds—and this is the case regarding how my analysis will unfold.

The photos are my tattoos that cover my semipermeable, corporeal shell. Not every photo contains only one individual tattoo, as they all begin to blend and change in dynamic so there is not one, two, three, or 12 individual tattoos. This begins to highlight how my body is becoming ONE ever evolving and changing tattooed BwO. This being said, I sat down with a gallery of 55 photos of my tattooed body (photographed by my dear friend, Barb Diedrich). Based on my desire and the resonance of each photo's beauty, I created further tension by manipulating them. Adding to the (re)production of this experimental work, my hope was to further manipulate these fragmented images of my skin using Laminar Express, an iPhone/iPad photography application (Kapoor, 2011), that allowed layering of images, text, and color, to rupture and at times perhaps to even distort the lines of ink on my body. In using this photo application, I combined two to four photos of my tattoos to disrupt and blur the images upon images within images.

The Laminar Express application allowed for the layering of multiple images into one image that I then edited. The colors blurred, images faded in and out, and text was added to create a different, becoming, tattoo image. This manipulation ranged from the inversion of images, adjusting colors of the layered compiled new/er image, adding text to the manipulated layered image, as well as using a myriad of filters to add to the texturing and fragmentation of the tattooed/lines. I was given full permission to use the photos for my own purposes by my friend/photographer Barb Diedrich in 2012; so, I continued to experiment with the remaining tattoo photos. After blending, distorting, and rupturing two to four tattoo photos at a time into a photo manipulation, I used four multilayered images as the springboard for my data gathering/analysis video-based conversations.

~ As is the nature of poststructural work, lines may un/fold throughout this piece and other plateaus appear; thus, becoming data differently than the current folded images. ~

Figures 1 and 2 are examples of using Laminar Express to overlay photos of my ink. What do you see?



Figure 1. Barb Diedrich/Krista Hilton alter/cation manipulation of star.



Figure 2. Barb Diedrich/Krista Hilton alter/cation manipulation of Sri Yantras.

The beauty of this application, in my opinion, was the ability to make a visual connection to multilayering, while at the same time looking at fragments and shards with/in and between these images. For me, this creates a space for conversations with/in conversations [or (co)collaboration with my multiselves/nodes] as I looked at these text/ured images differently and peeled them back, literally, figuratively, and theoretically. Supported with my previous work in that “we are not individual selves but rather nodal points with/in assemblages” (Hilton, 2011, p. 353), we are simply nodes (made up of lines) intersecting with nodes (made up of more lines) —becomings within becomings.

Finding inspiration in the photo elicitation work of Pink (2004, 2007), I intended to use the manipulated tattoo photos created with Laminar Express as the plateau from which further data generation and analysis unfolded. Pink (2007) noted that, “The connection between visual images and experienced reality is constructed through individual subjectivity and interpretation of images” (p. 32–33). Therefore, my next step of data generation was to record video sessions/dialogues with myself regarding these manipulated tattoo images as a springboard for conversations that interwove theory, purpose, and process(es) during this dissertating journey.

Pink's (2004) work suggested that the combination of both visual and textual representation provides a depth of data rich in various forms of knowledge. While recording these videos, I also used Dragon Dictate (Nuance Communications, 2014) that concurrently recorded the audio portion of my video conversations, which were then wirelessly transcribed to my computer. During these audio recordings, my multiselves could be found saying *comma* or *period*. This was necessary to let the recording device know when to enter such punctuation while it was transcribing my dictation/audio recordings. These transcripts of my video sessions allowed me to include snippets of these conversations in my dissertation for further dialogue/analyses that related to my purpose to explore how does my/a tattooed body function as becoming a BwO (Deleuze & Guattari, 1977, 1987). Therefore, the fragments of conversations used were those that resonated most with me regarding this desire to further peel back the layers to unfold this becoming.

As I discussed in Chapter 1, there is no traditional problem in this work, so too, is there no traditional form of analysis. There is no meaning to be found, per se, only that which emerges in different ways through the colliding of writing, photos, and videos. As occurs often in poststructural work, there tend always to be overlapping folds—and this is the case regarding how my analysis will unfold. It was during these visually and aurally recorded sessions that the manipulated tattoo image was used as the plateau for an analytical conversation. These conversations with my multiselves about a particular image were where talk of Deleuze and Guattari, BwOs, and tattoo literature collided. Over the course of 2 months, the following items were discussed in response to each of the four photo manipulations:

1. Look at the image via lens of a full BwO.
2. Look at the image via lens of an emptied BwO.

3. Inquire whether each image is approximating the limits of the hypochondriac, paranoid, schizo, drugged, and masochistic body. Why?
4. What can this academic tattooed BwO do via each story told with/in each image?

Given that these conversations were concurrently transcribed amidst the video sessions, there are portions of these conversations included in this dissertation for readers to question and trouble, thus adding even more layers to this poststructural unfolding.

Participant(s)

Given the nodal ethnographic nature of this work, the participant(s) of this work is(are) me, the I that is me, the committee members, Deleuze and Guattari, and the reader(s) as multiplicitous and one, at the same time, constantly moving and shifting, and with each directional change, a becoming (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). This work is, therefore, made up of infinite nodes. This body, merely a semipermeable, corporeal shell, made up of many selves that include Westernized categories/notions of White, female, middle class, first generation college student, academic, lesbian, connoisseur of tattoos, and researcher who grew up in the Midwest. I shall reiterate, indeed, that when I say I am the lone participant, please be sure to read this as me, the committee members, Deleuze and Guattari, and the reader(s)) as multiplicitous and one, at the same time, constantly moving and shifting, and with each directional change, a becoming. In light of this, there are also comments made in the form of ~ *italicized interruptions* ~ from and between and among my multiselves.

Issue(s) of Quality

Like most *post* methodologies, poststructuralism experiences the double-edged sword of still operating often within the space(s) of post-positivism that has firmly established checklists of rigor and quality, however with its non-binaristic functioning, poststructuralism is operating within structures that it functions between and deconstructs. Therefore lack(ing) the language

and necessity for yes/no checklists, and by nature functioning between these spaces, one can see the tensions that result in the value-laden context of quality. Lather (1993), in her seminal piece, “Fertile obsession: Validity after poststructuralism,” helped to frame the (lack of) structural framing that is poststructuralism when dealing with the concepts of validity and quality, that are “multiple, partial, endlessly deferred” (p. 675). As there are multitruths in poststructuralism, it is therefore fitting that there are endless possibilities and meanings to what *quality* may, and may, and may constitute.

Merrick (1999) further addressed the awareness and multilenses possibly needed in assessing validity and reliability in that “as qualitative research continues to evolve, different forms of presenting qualitative work will need to be developed” (p. 33). Further, as an example of creating “radically different criteria for evaluation” (Merrick, 1999, p. 33), Mosher (2013) examined this issue of quality in reflecting on her video-based public ethnography dissertation in the following statement: “Through the process of advocating for acceptance of these visual texts in an academic setting, I developed an initial framework of criteria for evaluating the quality and rigor of nontraditional public ethnographic reports” (p. 429). While developing a framework of criteria for my work, I did envision the role of my doctoral advisory committee, as well as feedback from colleagues, serving as several points of reflection amidst the unfolding of my dissertation. The use of ~ *interruptions* ~ in the form of multiple conversations with myself(ves) creates a space for dialogue and questioning of quality and rigor throughout this research.

Ethics

Kaufmann (2011c) wrote a beautiful piece touching on poststructural ethics, focusing on whether her desiring to rupture another’s perception of a concept is ethical. I suppose my desire is similar in my work, especially when asked what effect I intend to have on my audience. Providing what I deem to be a brilliant overview of Deleuze’s vision of the concept of ethics,

Kaufmann summated it nicely, in that “immanent ethics, built on the understanding of the continual and dynamic unfolding of the virtual, is not a way of knowing; it is a way of thinking, living, and becoming” (p. 152). Coming forth from the space of Deleuzo-Guattarian theory, I experience these unfoldings of concepts viscerally, for it is how I navigate the virtual and realness of this world daily. Ergo, I feel that the effect I hope to have on my audience is one of looking at the world and thinking differently, in reference to both my audience and myself, for that is ethically imperative to me as a poststructural researcher. Otherwise, “to remain captured in the same concepts produces the same results and allows the same illusionary truths to code our world” (Kaufmann, 2011c, p. 153).

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS

Operating via the lens of an emptied BwO, introspectively reflecting on my varied images within this space was perhaps the most challenging lens by which to make meaning, incorporate, and eventually come to acknowledge and accept that it was a concept in constant flux for me. Deleuzian irony at its best! I think this lens was my biggest emotional struggle to wrap my head around, because through my interviews I recognized that I am often the one to put signifiers and structure(s) on my disorganized, tattooed body becoming to navigate through every day.

~ At this point in my life, I thought I was past that and had arrived. What an interesting notion “to arrive,” tension arises as I get sucked back into binaristic tendencies of beginnings and endings, as if there is a destination to validate that I have made it. ~

My Unremitting Tension for Meaning Making

Mindful of early motivations that inspired and initially gave meaning to this work, I am reminded of the perceived perceptions that I so intently believed others were placing on my tattooed body with even the smallest glance. Regardless of whether others’ signifiers and judgment were/are actually cast toward this inked, corporeal shell of mine, it appears that I am doing enough of my own structural projection. I have come to experience in both talking and writing what it means for me to see my/this body from an emptied BwO lens is that the focus is more on me, by me, and the ways in which I actively navigate particular space(s)—not at all with whom I am navigating the spaces. This revelation highlights why this struggle has been so poignant and complicated for me, because it is internally driven, inconsequential of any and all external shapings over multitudinous years. In addition to putting the structure of tattooed lines on this body that is mine, I, too, am clearly continuing to put a plethora of empty and often

unnecessary signifiers on it as well, while often pointing the proverbial finger at the nonverbals of others.

~ Mirror reflections of my multiselves that are me, you, and all of us at the same time, is where all and none of this meaning making brilliantly collide. ~

Ergo, looking at the four multilayered images of my tattooed body with an emptied BwO lens highlighted the arduous journey of the approximation to becoming a BwO. It started to emerge in me that while recognizing there could be a continuum of a body with organs, to a full body without organs, to an emptied body without organs—the epiphanic moment arose when I could step out of my linear time and space and envision that they are all one, ALL happening at the same time, and here I am STILL trying to affix labels and meanings to put binaristic lines where their existence would be illusive at best. For I am a body with and without organs at the same time, seeing myself as the dough-like image provided by Kirkpatrick et al. (2014) being folded back upon by both myself and perceived external forces of structure and (de)structure, and unfolding an amalgamation of all that was and is and is to come (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). I laugh at myself as my very honed, skilled, and rewarded *think like other qualitative researchers* mind still pushes to think differently even though I worked so hard to think the same.

~ Perhaps becoming is unraveling, indeed! ~

In watching and re-watching my interviews from the lens of an emptied BwO, it has definitely surfaced that my love affair with Deleuze and Guattari (1987) that began many years ago is ever circling, with no beginning or end. Let me elaborate, as I remember in my first article (Hilton, 2011) that I savored getting lost in the words of Deleuze and Guattari, and how the more I understood them, the muddier the meaning making continued to be from page to page, in and out of slippery slopes of concepts. I had found myself echoing this sentiment as I worked through the emptied BwO via [Image 3](#), at one moment thinking I had come to terms with the

emptied BwO being a covert passing body, but feeling viscerally jolted back to the space that while it is an emptied lens, there is and always will be motion and intensity of some degree, direction, and vibration across this body.

~ Just when I think I've ripped myself away from binaristic this or that reasoning, similar to others' perceptions of me, or rather my own perceptions of myself mentioned earlier, throughout this meaning making with the emptied BwO, I almost feel like my binaristic self keeps saying, "Hey, you know, if the full BwO consists of movement and vibrations, the empty BwO is void of such motion. Wait, maybe we're on to something here!" Perhaps the motion with the emptied BwO is intermittently stagnant, and even perceivably rigid and cutting to some degree, hence the revelations during- [Image 4](#) within [Interview 8](#) in feeling more alignment with the linear lines of the Sri Yantra resonating more with the empty BwO. ~

There almost seems to be a juxtaposition for me in looking at this hyper-modal image, because for whatever reason the line, the very pointed and I say rigid but not in a sense of, not in a negative rigidity sense, but in a, just an aesthetic linear pointed sense. It is easier for me, perhaps, to perceive the Sri Yantra with little to no movement, therefore aligning more with the emptied BwO with a façade of no flow or no intensity; however, I go back to and I have tried to work through this with Gale and Wyatt (2010) who write about writing through it. Well, I've been talking through it, working through it, thinking through it, and there's such tension for me in making sense of the emptied BwO perspective. [[Interview 8](#)/9:24]

Channeling Gale and Wyatt (2010) to write through this meaning making of the empty BwO, (yes, it's true that "just talk and write through it" became my internal mantra in reviewing my self-interviews, as I was still struggling to make sense of this lens), I believe I have arrived at the middle, my veritable plateau of mud puddles and rain boots. While I struggled with there being no movement of flow/intensities with an emptied BwO, I recognize that flow is a constant and maybe I just do not have the language to translate how it makes me feel as my hands are flailing. Or rather, it is by no means a *lack* of feeling as the vibrations resonate within me when I am occupying this space. I think it is more of a binary gripping tension of the illusive logical

mind that echoes “this or that” when in fact I am continuously reminded that it can be a full BwO and an empty BwO, which quite honestly baffles my mind within this time and space. Amidst [Interview 7](#), I feel this emotional lift from my shoulders around such meaning making. I arrive in the midst of the push and pull of movement and no movement in recognizing that an emptied BwO is more of a visceral feeling of vibrations to me. A calming peace surrounds me, as I had been experiencing such tension to define and make sense of this concept.

Let us further discuss this visual I constructed and have come to refer to as the bodies with and without organs spectrum (See Figure 3). Envision it with me, to the very far left as far as the eye can see and feel is *infinity*, slightly (it is all relative) to the right of that is the *full BwO*, and to the right of that appearing to fall somewhat in the middle of the spectrum is the *BwO*. To the right of the BwO is the *empty BwO*, then to the far right as far as one can see is the *body with organs* in all of its perceived social status in approximating the ever-changing cultural norms.

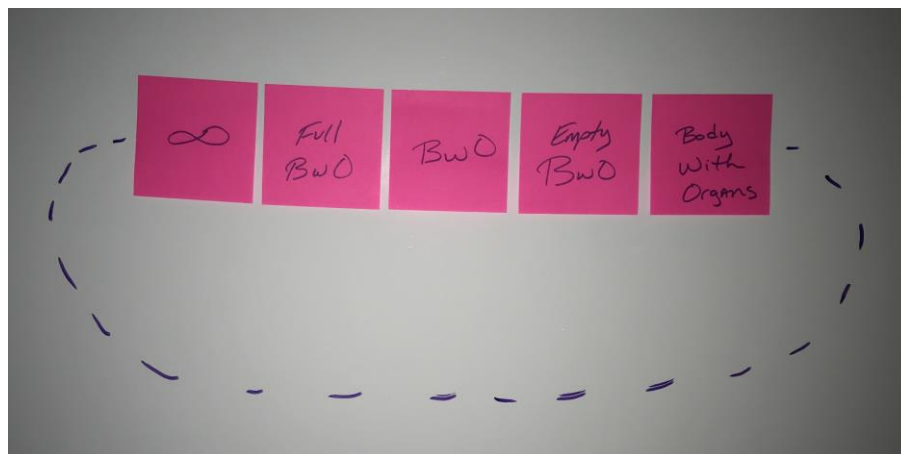


Figure 3. My bodies with and without organs spectrum.

~ Now, if you take this linear continuum and wrap it from end to end to make a circle, the far left end of infinity collides with the body with organs; therefore, as the circle gets smaller and smaller it then yields the body with organs becoming body without organs and ebbing and flowing between these myriad states. For it is the linearity of this time and space in which we live

that somehow nudges each of us in a direction of needing a state, a box, a label to be put/stuck in; and takes that one step further (likely motivated by the ego) to then hierarchically organize such spaces. There is seemingly no value in just being all and none of these bodies at the same time. ~

I found myself explaining this in more detail during Interview 6 from the emptied BwO lens in that the movement to pull away from the full BwO as well as the BwO is itself an emptying of a BwO. Therefore, approximating toward a perceived organized body either via the emptied BwO in its modes of passing, or in moving even more toward a body with organs, are both efforts in becoming an emptied BwO [[Interview 6/9:26](#)].

The implicit shadowing of my face, that if it weren't me I might not know who it is, honestly. I wonder if others will feel that way as well? And how beautiful and purposeful it seems to be, even though it wasn't purposeful in the taking of that photo, so that others can't see my face because of the vulnerability of standing half naked [to show and view my tattoos on the front of my body that actually exist on my back, inadvertently disorganizing this body further to elicit the pulling and pushing from a body with organs] ([Interview 6/3:10](#)).

~ Finally getting closer to a space of understanding Deleuzo-Guattarian and quantum physics the concept of one and that all of my selves, colliding with y(our) self is all one, I am wondering if I am also comprised of a thousand plateaus, than in addition to the disorganized, hyper-modal layers add texture and gradient to this tattooed body becoming a BwO? ~

Overlaid plateaus constituted of collisions of planes of my body, for example in [Image 2](#), the front left side of my body is brought to collide with images that typically reside on my back, thus pushing this tattooed body to further approximate a full BwO with a different multifaceted view of the hyper-modal images. Within these images, having flipped and moved them, the empty signifiers are juxtaposed into a new space of (empty) meaning making for us all. In [Image 2](#), the dynamics of the disruptive images, coupled with the intensities produced and sustained by these images of significance, compiled of all of these signifiers of astrological signs and numbers

and goddesses a plenty to guard and protect, are constantly shifting now layered upon each other, which in turn constantly shifts the meaning of this body (See [Snippet 1](#)).

Now You See Me, Now You See Me Differently: My Colorfully Covert Passing Body

Working through my meaning making of the emptied BwO led me on a path to question my tattooed body further as it navigates space. Realizing that most would consider me/my corporeal shell to be heavily tattooed, it was slightly revelatory for me to recognize that there are still moments and contexts in which all of my ink will be covered. Whether this covering is deliberate in intention is opened to further reflection in [Interview 7](#). The emptied BwO lens on my tattooed body triggered me to perceive it more so as a covert passing body, creating unanswered questions around the covering of my colored skin to the placement of particular tattooed images.

An emptied BwO, almost being this covert operator, navigating as a productive, non-sterile body for others on the outside to see and perceive, however it is just passing in a way, right? It's more of, it's an undercover full BwO just passing as an emptied BwO. So in light of all of that, looking at [Image 3](#), what is being shown here are all items that oddly and covertly enough, three out of the four images I see colliding here I never really see on my own body. So while not purposefully passing in any sort of way, it is merely a positioning that I don't see it; which maybe positioning is purposeful, whether consciously or unconsciously to help with the passing? ([Interview 7](#)/4:00)

While there is always serious consideration regarding where my tattoos will be placed on my body, it is worth noting that the factors in consideration of said placement have shifted since I got my first tattoo when I was 18. Before I even made the appointment for my first ever tattoo, which is that of three dolphins swimming around my entire right ankle, I was staunch in my conviction to have what was at the time a tattoo that went around my entire ankle. You see, while people were getting thorned stems and barbed wires, my love for dolphins and the ocean somehow unfolded in how I would make this a unique experience for me.

While the 2-hour sitting to get my first installation of ink was full of adrenaline and some pain (as I was quickly reminded of as one of the dolphins landed squarely on my Achilles tendon), I remember the moment of panic that arrived 2–3 days post the bravado, “Oh shit, I have dolphins on my ankle that everyone will see when I’m not wearing jeans or dress pants. What had I done?!” As that was 20 years ago, I will say that the bulk of my body artwork was completed on areas of my body that were able to be covered should I desire such flexibility. From my lower to upper back, to my shoulder and rib cage, I walked the line of becoming a tattoo enthusiast while still maintaining an outwardly professional appearance.

It was not until my mid-20s that I decided that I loved my artwork more than any job or professional perceptions, and at that point the visibility of my tattoos increased. My arms, feet, and right leg over the past decade have become large canvases for sacred geometry, Tibetan goddesses, a phoenix, and an oak tree that has found its roots atop my right foot.

~ When I interview others, it never ceases to amaze me how they will often note that due to our conversation, they are now seeing things differently in their own life. I am now this interviewee in this nodal ethnography, finding these aha moments of very conscious decision making around how I have wanted my body to be perceived. I am realizing that there has been a pendulum-like swing for me at some point—between either dropping those concerns completely or, through this exercise, recognizing that I have indeed oscillated between plateaus of caring and not caring what others think and believe about me because of the ink covering my body. While I understand this oft ego-driven need in the normalization of our society to look a certain way, I also recognize that just because I have wandered further down the continuum toward caring less, that I should be kind to myself when those moments of conscious covert passing arrive in whatever context they may arise. ~

Reflecting on my emptied BwO interviews, I found myself responding with the following question: Do I approximate an empty BwO more in forgetting about images on my body? More specifically, is the forgetting simply because I have had the tattoos for so long. Or, could it also be because some of the images I rarely ever see due to their placement on my body? In [Image 3](#), I notice that 3 of the 4 images colliding are tattoos on my back; hence, I do not often see them. Looking at the intersection of these images through the eyes of an emptied BwO, I now see these layers of images creating different becomings, arriving in and out of my left arm that is covered in a colorful sleeve. I note that my left arm is becoming nautical star, as well as sun and moon. With this emptied lens, I find myself questioning my intentions of the current placement of most of these images (i.e., the sun and moon, goddess, and nautical star) currently on my back. Does having such images on my back, as well as any other area on my body that is covered with long sleeves and pants 8 months out of the year, purposely lend itself to a passing covert body that seemingly appears organized, but rather the only organization is within its (dis)organization?

Speaking from the lens of an emptied BwO, and a passing “now you see me, now you don’t” kind of way, there are only a few different rays...peaking out from the image. The more I sit and stare at the image and the colorful bulk of it which is my left arm, I can see through that, and I start to see the sun and moon image behind that, which is interesting [because] I don’t know that I saw that during my first set of videos. ... The more you stare...almost going cross-eyed in some ways, you could see the image kind of rise up to you from the backfront to the forefront. That’s what looking at this hyper-modal [Image 3](#) reminds me of. So, how interesting is that from a covert passing? I didn’t even really see the entirety of the sun and the moon behind what is the image of my left arm. But the more time I sit here and see it and stare at it, it’s as if my left arm is becoming nautical star, and sun and moon. So, that’s interesting. My left arm, which predominantly seems to be, you know, very Buddhist inspired...and then rising out of or rising up through that more dominant image of what is my arm are these astronomy-based images of the moon, the sun and the star. That’s pretty cool, I mean that’s what I love about this work right? To me, it’s always something different and I want to see something new but nothing’s new, right? You’re just seeing it differently for the first time. ([Interview 7/7:11](#))

~ This interesting notion of staring at an image, perhaps St. Pierre would lean toward the intention of “looking hard” as is relative to “reading hard,” that thus results in seeing different

images emerge, brings quite a different twist to this becoming tattooed BwO. Looking at the themes of the covert passing body tangled up in, adding to, the tension in the meaning making of the emptied BwO, I now wonder if this corporeal shell of mine, even with its multitudinous layers of ink and black lines, while fragmented with tattoos spanning the past 20 years, has now created yet another semipermeable shell that in passing is just that, passing. For there is always so much going on with the designs on my body that often I don't even notice a subtle curve, or particular shading or dot work that create images within images. Perhaps we are all, regardless of our amount of tattoos, just covert passing bodies, especially if we do not allocate the time to see, feel, and peel back the layers of all that is behind, within, and between this encasement of a perceivable body. ~

Blurred Vision of Selves: When More Lines are Less Lines

~ It was the second year of my master's program, I was in my mid-20s, and I found myself in a tattoo shop in Columbus, Ohio getting the first, of what would end up to be many, tattoo on my inner right bicep. Up until this time, I had judged other female friends who had barbed wire or thorny rose stems tattooed around the top of their arms, and I swore that would never be me. Well, while my feigned youthful cockiness may have steered me away from those ink options at the time, I have not only added several more tattoos to my arms, I have even gone so far as to cover my entire left arm in a plethora of colorful stories. It is also as I write in the spring of 2016, that my right arm is becoming a three-quarter length sleeve of black lines and stippled dots, amidst grey and black shading of mandalas and sacred geometry. It is painful and beautiful, this becoming. Alas, here I stand, 14 years later from that afternoon in Columbus, Ohio, considered now to be heavily tattooed by local artists, and most days when I look in the mirror, I don't even see myself as tattooed. I'm just a colorful blur that makes up the corporeal shell of Krista. ~

Perhaps empty is just another fragment of the full BwO, and the full is just another fragment of the emptied BwO, while both contribute to the *becoming BwO* that is this tattooed body [[Interview 8/8:12](#)]. It is as if the more I approximate becoming a tattooed body, the images begin to blur and traces of one tattoo are becoming traces of becoming tattooed. This defining, this being in the space of becoming a tattooed body, is unfolding to be quite relative from the 14-year journey I previously spoke of, to where I currently stand with about 50% of my corporeal shell covered in some shape, color, or shade of ink. I often wonder if, on some level, I recognized the process of this *becoming* when I got my first tattoo at 18, and now 20+ years later, my skin has morphed into this lively canvass? If only I could channel myself in 1996, perhaps I could derive some insight!

You know it's even interesting in looking at this image here, [Image 4](#) with the two Sri Yantras and the Koi fish, and even looking over to the far right of the image where the far right Sri Yantra is and I can see a very hint of an image behind that, which is actually some of the water from the Koi. It's almost like there are just traces, traces of Koi becoming Sri Yantra...becoming tattooed body of Krista. ([Interview 8/3:50](#))

Traces of lines become traces of other lines that create new lines while at the same time blending into a blurry shade of what constitutes Krista's corporeal shell from the lens of an emptied BwO. That being said, I feel as if I can deduce that even continuing to add pieces of art to my body, I have thus reached a plateau of becoming tattooed that will yield a state of constant blurring. Concurrently, this becoming tattooed body of Krista also begins to fade away until I no longer see the constructed tattooed image of me, and following Deleuze and Guattari (1987), I think this is likely because there is no self, the epitome of no *I*, while at the same time constituting many selves. Re-watching my final interview for the fifth time, this could not resonate more! For it was unlike any interview playback I had watched before, as it dawned on me that not only was I experiencing this surreal moment of watching myself in my final interview for my dissertation, but amidst this video I was watching myself interview myself with

both the emptied BwO lens while looking at and responding to a hyper-modal image of my tattooed self. The creation of these hyper-modal images, however inadvertently, has led to the unfolding of more fragments and layers translating into other/multiselves of me; indeed a happenstance, yet purposeful and creative disruption of the fragments of my/selves to allow for different meaning making.

While I feel sometimes this is almost nonsensical, these meanderings in my head around these tattoos and in creating these images, [in that] I take the tattoos and create other images of tattoos or just create other images, [to] create other. It adds to the layers and fragments and maybe even creates other selves of me. ([Interview 8/14:38](#))

The multiselves of me, amidst the theme of *more lines, less lines, blurred lines*, weave throughout many aspects of this research. Whether it dances amidst the hyper-modal images of my tattoos created as data points, or in crossing over from the emptied to the full BwO lenses, I am most affected by this theme in my mirror on a daily basis. Albeit when I look in the mirror, I do not often see the distinction of images or individual tattoo pieces any longer. For while they have blended into what feels like me, when you look closely there are lines that define their flow, albeit with no beginning or end. However, tension apparently exists for me, on some plane, in being mindful within certain contexts on what to wear regarding what conglomerate of lines and their fragments of color will be visible and who the audience may be. I shall elaborate in the following interview excerpt:

I do find it interesting, that in taking the plunge to get the phoenix tattooed on the lower part of my left arm, that even now in wearing long sleeve shirts, any observer will always see at least a fragment or parts of the image down toward my wrist on my left arm, and I find myself sometimes being more mindful about that than other times. I guess that's the spaces we play in, whether it is in academia where I do feel more comfortable about walking around in short sleeves, whereas I now find that even the fun play-space of the innovation lab that I work in, that I have yet to this day (and I've been there 6 months) worn short sleeves. [I know this is] because I have to pass through the employees on the other half of the company whose dress code is much more business based, and maybe even bankerish based – dress pants, dress shirts, heels, those sorts of things. So navigating through that space to get to my innovative safe space, I find that I don't wear short sleeves or shirts that have no sleeves on them whatsoever. That alone gives insight

to me, that there is this perception of this very productive body in workspaces, and I can see and feel and understand how having a body that looks very different from that work space can not only be disruptive but is even more highlighted to be disorganized and different than, other than. ([Interview 5](#)/18:12)

Vibrations, Density, and Speed...

A resonance, vibration, constant flow with varying speeds and intensities, these speeds (~ *do colors have particular vibrations* ~) are sometimes faster or slower in approximating the full BwO given my *perceived* higher concentration of color/ink in a given area on the body (i.e., left arm sleeve in relation to right arm with only two tattoos). Given that color possesses vibration, it would thus lend to a certain perception that indeed my left arm, covered in a very colorful full sleeve, would therefore be of a higher vibration than other tattooed areas of my body.

~ I look at my left arm, which is covered in bright colors, and I also look at my right leg, which has recently been decorated with a Japanese inspired paint-brushed style black oak tree that extends from the top of my foot up to my hip, and I wonder how the motion varies with the density of colors as well as the colors in particular. ~

Given that line of thought, it is interesting then to think that because vibration is movement, and a full BwO is constituted by constant motion, that perhaps certain parts of my body are moving at faster or even directionally different speeds. Adding yet another layer to the already fragmented pieces of my selves, with the largest organ that physically comprises this corporeal shell, my skin, that is always moving given the high concentration of ink on my body. A fascinating thought to ponder in highlighting once more that my body is not mine, there is no self; however, while there are bits and pieces of me, and even more bits and pieces of those bits and pieces colliding with you and you and you, we still energetically end up being one.

However, not only does the vibration of colors surface in my conversations with my selves, but I also find myself in my very first interview defining lines as both different intensities

and different migrations. I reflect on the rigid lines of the Sri Yantra on my right forearm, the curved lines of my phoenix rising on my left arm, and lines of my Koi fish on my right ribs that elicit more movement than others. (See [Snippet 2](#))

The mandala itself, which the Sri Yantra comprises, is a beautiful, meaningful, spiritual representation of constant change. So, while I want to say embodied and I recognize that everything is an empty signifier for the most part, it really approximates...the Sri Yantra and the mandala pushing in the direction toward everything is fleeting, nothing ever stays the same, it's very dynamic and constantly moving. To give a little background actually of the mandala, the Tibetan monks will spend 30 days constructing a sand mandala, typically on the top of a table, and after that 30 days is complete and they've spent all that time constructing this beautiful, colorful image, they will then sweep the image up, scoop and it's constructed of sand, so they scoop the sand up, and put it into a little container and then they take it out to the nearest body of water and dump the sand into the water so that it may continue flowing, and changing, and... continuing its malleable intensities throughout nature. ([Interview 1](#)/4:04, [Image 4](#))

Mesmerized by these malleable intensities of the Sri Yantra that are in constant movement by the sheer inhabitation that it currently takes on my inner right forearm, I hear myself echo how much I love the pointed lines that comprise the image, for it is “the most symbolically, always moving tattoo on my body, it is never sitting still, and it is a constant and gentle reminder that the only thing that is constant is change itself” ([Interview 1](#)/6:40, [Image 4](#)). What a poignant example of the ever-changing full BwO represented in this moment by a fragment of the Mandala, intentionally constructed to be returned eventually to the one of nature.

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APPENDIX

Image 1



Image 2

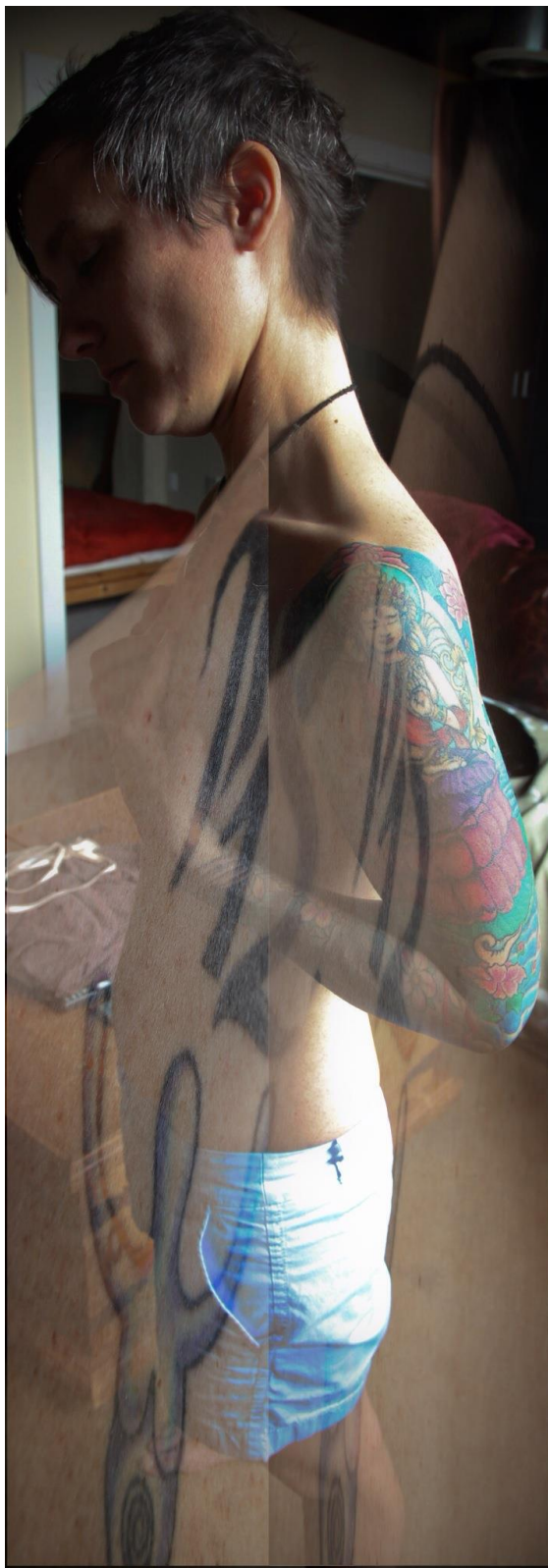
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Image 3 ([return to text](#))

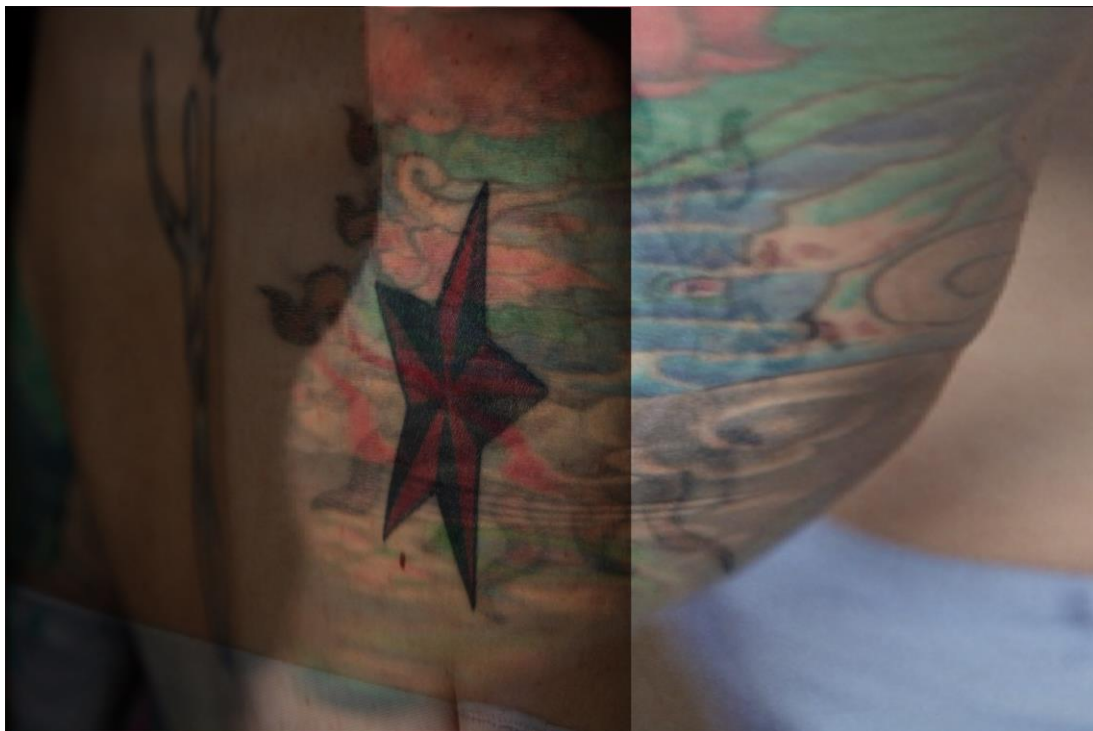
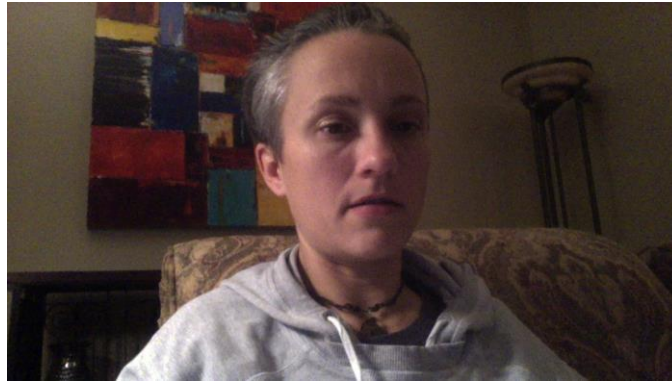


Image 4 ([return to text](#))

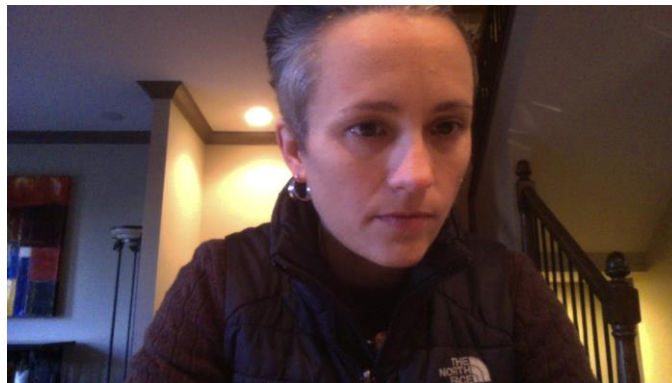


Interview 1 (discussion of Image 1 using the Full BwO lens)

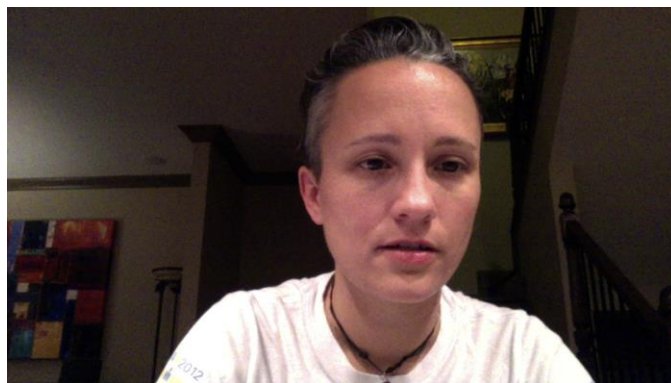
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Interview 2 (discussion of Image 2 using the Full BwO lens)



Interview 3 (discussion of Image 3 using the Full BwO lens)



Interview 4 (discussion of Image 4 using the Full BwO lens)



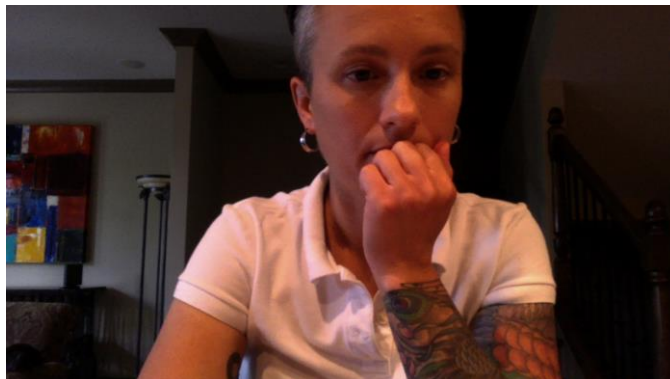
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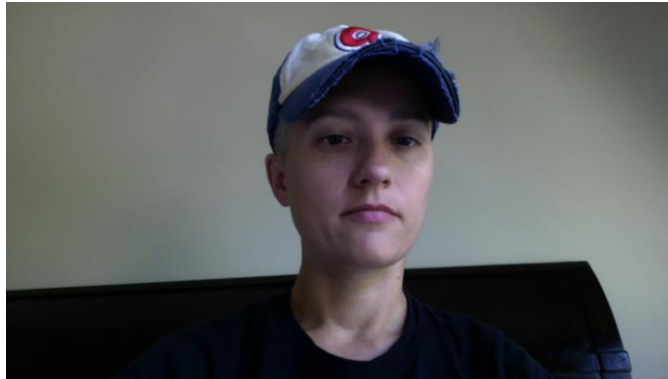
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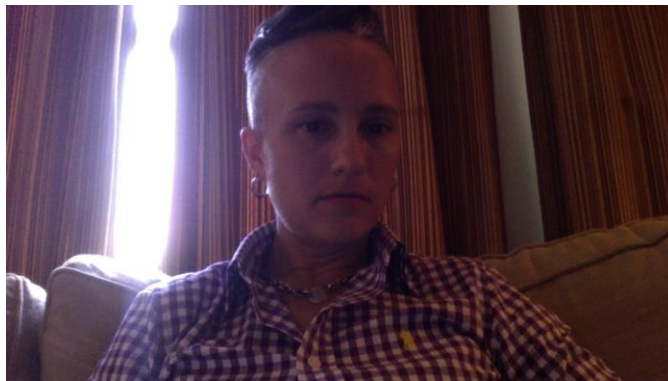
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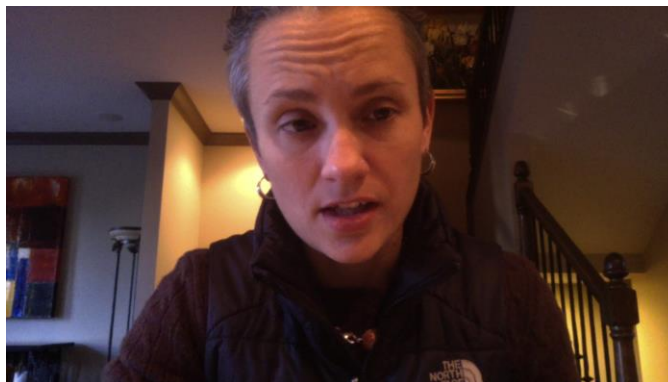
Interview 8 (discussion of Image 4 using the Emptied BwO lens)

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Snippet 1

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Snippet 2

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